

Vermont Law School Exchange Semester In Practice: Brussels, Belgium**US Mission to the European Union – Foreign Commercial Service****BACKGROUND**

I interned at the United States Mission to the European Union in the Foreign Commercial Service section Fall semester 2008. The US Mission to the EU (USEU) helps to maintain diplomatic relations between the US and the EU. USEU houses several sections including: the department of state (political, economic, and public affairs sections), Animal Plant Health and Inspection Service (APHIS), the Foreign Agricultural Service (of the US Department of Agriculture), the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR), Foreign Commercial Service (of the US Department of Commerce), the Department of Homeland Security (including Customs and Border Protection), the Department of Treasury, the Department of Justice, the Department of Defense, and the US Agency for International Development. Each section has an office at USEU. The sections work independently and with each other depending on the task at hand.

The Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) assists US businesses established in the EU, exporting to the EU, and those that wish to export to the EU. As my internship was at FCS, my main tasks involved international trade. Before I arrived at USEU, I thought the internship would be broader. I anticipated working in all sections at USEU with a variety of people. I quickly saw that my expectations would not be met. I was interning for FCS and that meant that I would be working for FCS, exclusively. Although the many sections often work together, the bulk of work is done independently. This was not

something I originally liked as I was interested in gaining as much experience in as many areas as I possibly could to see what I like most. I based my expectations on the student who had this internship in Fall 2007. She was able to work in many sections and focus on work that she was really interested in. FCS changed the internship by the time I arrived to ensure that FCS interns do FCS work. While I was originally disappointed, there was plenty of FCS work to take care of and I was able to complete several projects because my time was focused in one area of USEU, rather than all over the Mission.

Interning at USEU is not a traditional legal internship. Most people who work in the building do not have a law degree and no one in FCS is an attorney. Therefore I needed to find a legal mentor who I could meet with three to four times throughout the semester. When I arrived at FCS, my supervisor had already arranged for Dan Mullaney, a lawyer from the state department to be my legal mentor. I met with Dan three times throughout the course of the semester – once at the beginning, once in the middle, and once at the end. Dan is a really nice guy and a great person to have in your corner. He works with many people at USEU in many different sections and thus seems to know what is going on at USEU all the time. In addition to my scheduled meetings with Dan, he would stop by my office once in a while when he was on the first floor to see how things were going. My meetings with Dan were productive and enjoyable. I generally showed him what I was working on and he would give me feedback. He'd offer advice on editing, background information, and suggest ways to make my work more legal. If I would change anything, I would have scheduled at least four meetings with Dan and would have scheduled them every three weeks or so. That way he would have had a better idea of my work product and I would have received more feedback from him than I

was able. The last meeting, while interesting, was not of much help because I was leaving in one week and starting to close out my projects. Scheduling more meetings early on and foregoing the final meeting would have been more productive.

SUPERVISION

I was supervised by Louis Santamaria, Standards Attache, at FCS. Louis monitors the various standards and regulations required to export to the EU. Normally the Commercial Attache oversees the intern program, however, FCS was between Commercial Attaches during my internship and therefore Louis stepped in. This means that those who intern after 2008 may have a very different experience because the program may vary depending on the coordinator. This is not to say that the coordinator determines the entire internship. Louis rarely gave me work, instead, he determined the breadth of the internship – FCS and I would meet with him randomly. He would check in on me to make sure that I was not over-extending myself and that I was meeting deadlines. He was also there for any concerns or issues that I had regarding my work or living in Brussels, generally.

GOALS

I had several goals when I arrived at FCS. I wanted to learn more about international law. I was very interested in advocacy – I wanted to learn exactly what the US does to influence the European Union in the decision making process. And I was interested in attending as many meetings as I could to observe what type of negotiations take place between the US and the EU. I was also interested in international food regulation. The US is a major food exporter to the EU and I was interested in the regulations and the advocacy that goes on surrounding food. Unfortunately, when I

arrived, I learned that some of these goals were not practical. After I learned that I would be exclusively interning with FCS, I had to readjust my goals. This was fine because there were and are a fair amount of areas I'd like to improve in. I was able to work significantly on my counseling skills. FCS gets a ton of e-mail from US business owners and workers who export or would like to export to the EU. The e-mailers ask questions concerning their products and ask for direction in exporting. Some of the FCS staff research EU laws, regulations, and directives to assist US companies in their exporting. FCS staff examine EU law and write or call the US exporters with information on requirements for testing, product specifications, etc. As the EU has a large body of law concerning all products, this is a very time consuming and confusing process.

WORK

I counseled in a few areas. I wrote a few standards counseling sessions – explained where clients could find information regarding exporting things such as medical devices, boat decking, and construction equipment (among other things.) I also counseled on one food supplements question. The bulk of my work focused around REACH and was supervised by Flavie Guerin, a Commercial Specialist, and the only one at FCS that was familiar with REACH at the time I interned. REACH is EU chemicals legislation that protects health and the environment by monitoring all chemicals (in everything) in the EU. Part of the legislation required all chemicals used in the EU to be registered with the European Chemicals Agency by December 1, 2008. Because my internship was before and during this huge deadline that affected an enormous amount of products, I learned the most and did the most on REACH. I had never heard of REACH prior to the internship. When I was first presented with the fact that I would mainly be

working in this area, I was a bit hesitant. Although, it seemed to make sense as a fair amount of my coursework has focused on environmental law. However, my coursework has, almost exclusively, focused on US environmental law. The one class that I took in international environmental law focused more on oil spills and animals than chemicals. REACH ended up being the most difficult area I worked in and one of the most satisfying.

I began my work on REACH by reading some of the guidance documents that the European Commission has created to guide people on the REACH requirements. The legislation is over 300 pages and is somehow, still quite vague. The guidance documents were a good place to start because they are written in a more accessible manner than the legislation. At first I wanted to read every page of background information that I could get my hands on that involved REACH. But reading only goes so far. Soon after I started reading some of the documents, Flavie threw me into counseling. I felt really unprepared to prepare any counseling session (even though the session is more guidance than advice.) But, looking back, it was the best way to familiarize myself with REACH. REACH is so long and broad that a counseling session immediately requires focus in one area surrounding the question. As I did more and more counseling sessions, I learned more and more about REACH. Flavie was a great source of help. She edited all of my counseling sessions in the beginning and explained things that I didn't understand correctly from researching. I learn best by talking through things, and Flavie was a great ear. She took time to listen and corrected me in a constructive manner when I was off base.

In addition to counseling on REACH, I also assisted Flavie when she conducted webinar presentations on REACH. I helped research issues that would be presented, edited presentations, and assisted in answering the questions that resulted from the webinar. One of my largest projects under REACH came up when Flavie's son got very ill. Flavie was out of the office after the November 6th webinar and was not able to make it back to the office until the Friday after Thanksgiving. Following the webinar, there were 57 questions about REACH that were supposed to be answered. It was quite time-sensitive because the REACH pre-registration deadline was December 1st and many companies were questioning whether or not they needed to pre-register depending on their products. Normally, Flavie, someone else, and I would split the work for the 57 questions. But with Flavie gone, I was the only one with sufficient REACH knowledge to answer the questions. I ended up having to answer the REACH questions in three days, which is significantly shorter than the amount of time I would normally put into a counseling session. Sometimes I would research one question for an entire day. Of course, these answers were shorter given the time frame and quantity. Although this was an incredibly stressful assignment, it was ultimately one I was proud of. I was able to understand REACH well enough to answer all 57 questions with very little guidance and I was able to adhere to the time constraint. It was a good opportunity to do non-intern type work as the lead employee was out of the office.

My other tasks for FCS included attending meetings, seminars, and conferences in Brussels that related to international trade and the US. I would take notes, sometimes state USEU's status on the issue, and write-up the notes for distribution at the office. This was a great experience and one of my favorite tasks. It was a good way to be

introduced to different areas of international law. I discovered many areas that I had no idea existed. It was nice to realize that the legal field is broader than I once thought and there are interesting job opportunities all over the world and in all kinds of areas.

Another task I had was to draft short reports (generally between one and five pages) explaining an area of EU law that was up for revision, had a major deadline, or was potentially affecting the US in a negative fashion. This type of assignment helped me determine what supervisors are asking for. I quickly learned that clarifying the assignment early on was key as it saved me a great deal of time and ensured that I did not research too far out of the project scope. The reports assigned also helped me hone my writing skills to write what the office really needed to know on certain issues. My favorite research report was on the animal testing deadlines in the cosmetics directive that would affect the US cosmetics industry.

I also preformed some administrative type tasks. I helped update the FCS website and contacted companies to see if they wished to advertise on the FCS website. I was not very happy with this assignment, but it was a nice break from reading dense legislation and sitting in front of the computer. It allowed me to talk to companies doing international work and see what types of things they are interested in.

OUTSIDE PROJECTS

I was also able to work on a project outside of FCS. As I mentioned earlier, I am quite interested in international food regulation and trade. When I told my supervisor, he suggested I speak with the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) downstairs to see what they do. After speaking with FAS and my supervisor, we decided I could take on one project for FAS. The project I worked on was a report that focused on animal genetics

trade between the US and the EU. I identified major EU markets and potential problems that might arise. This was a very interesting project and a good opportunity given the fact that my internship was focused solely in FCS. Unfortunately, the project constantly weighed on my mind. I was busier than expected with FCS work throughout the semester and at the beginning was not able to focus on the FAS project as much as I should have. Ultimately I was able to produce a report for FAS because I was able to finish up my FCS work in a timely fashion. Looking back, I think that everyone was worried that I would not be able to finish the FAS project, and therefore both FCS and FAS were not too happy with the setup. But I finished and everyone seemed pleased.

PEOPLE

The work at FCS was interesting and the people were great. I enjoyed getting to know everyone that worked there, but wish I had taken the time to come out of my shell more. I was quite shy in asking for lunch dates and hanging out in other people's offices. I always worked hard, took short lunches, and chatted only when people came to my office. As a result I missed out on getting to know everyone better. I was able to befriend those who would stop by my office, but not those who didn't. At the end I found out that many people thought I was shy, which was true. But now I wish that I had forced myself to chat more. I also felt very restricted to the FCS floor, but wish I had ventured out to the other section offices. There are a lot of interesting people who work at USEU and each one has a great story to tell about the work he/she has done to get where he/she is. Some of the people I highly recommend going to lunch or coffee with are: Louis Santamaria (FCS), Flavie Guerin (FCS), Sylvia Mohr (FCS), Ashley Miller (FCS), Kelly Stange (FAS), Yvan Polet (FAS), Dan Mullaney (USTR), Peter Chase

(Econ), and the ambassador. These are just a few people who have interesting life paths.

There are so many more!

TIPS

Tips for USEU: I wore a suit everyday so that I could go to meetings at a minute's notice. There is a cashier who changes money at a great rate. The cashier only takes checks and I have heard that one cashier doesn't allow interns to take advantage of the service. I was able to, however. Meet as many people as you can.

LIVING

Living in Brussels was a fun experience, though difficult at times. It is an expensive city and after the cost of a round trip plane flight, there isn't too much left over for rent and travel. I rented an apartment with my boyfriend because I thought that was what I could do. Only later did I find out about a variety of options for living on a budget in Brussels. Several other interns at USEU and the US Embassy placed ads in Brussels Weekly. They were able to find low cost rent from people who rent out small apartments in their homes. Some lived for free with people from USEU. Many times staff at USEU and the Embassy have spare bedrooms and plan to travel. In exchange for taking care of the house and/or pets, some interns paid a small amount of rent or nothing at all. One intern lived in a hostel that had one side for overnight guests and another side for monthly rent at a reduced rate. Another intern researched coops and found a large house that held students from all over the world interning in Brussels. She shared a room with three other girls and her cheap rent included all meals, utilities, and laundry. I enjoyed living in an apartment. I was able to feel like I was more of a permanent resident of Brussels

rather than a temporary student and I was able to learn a cute neighborhood well. But it was expensive.

I stayed in Brussels most weekends and only traveled four times, three of which were day trips. As a result I felt that I was really a part of Brussels. But I recommend traveling more. Brussels is pretty central and there are great cities all around that are worth seeing. If I had it to do over again, I likely would try and find cheap or free rent somewhere and travel more. (Please note that others think traveling is not worth it because you don't meet as many people in Brussels. I think that you can do both well.)

Brussels has good public transportation. Monthly passes are available as are single and multiple ride cards. I walked almost everywhere and used the public transportation in the morning.

I do not speak French and was able to get around quite well with a French travel dictionary. Many people speak English and the city is fairly approachable. But, not speaking French was annoying at times. There are French classes offered all over the city, but are quite expensive.

CONCLUSION

I recommend USEU-FCS to those who wish to work in international business and international law. It is a good option for students who are not thrilled with the idea of working as a lawyer because USEU offers so many areas of opportunities where legal training is an asset, but traditional legal work is not necessary. I am glad I went to Brussels for this internship. Living and working in a foreign city was interesting and I learned a lot about myself – what I like and what I don't like. My horizon is certainly broader.